

Phyllis Galembo: Mexico, Masks & Rituals

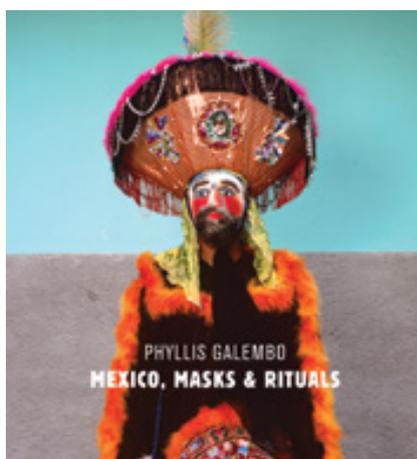
Text by Víctor M. Espinosa, George Otis.

Since 1985, photographer Phyllis Galembo has traveled extensively to photograph sites of ritual dress in Africa and the Caribbean. In her latest body of work, collected in this new publication, Galembo turns to Mexico, where she captures cultural performances with a subterranean political edge. Using a direct, unaffected portrait style, Galembo captures her subjects informally posed but often strikingly attired in traditional or ritualistic dress.

Masking is a complex tradition in which the participants transcend the physical world and enter the spiritual realm. Masks, costumes and body paint transform the human body and encode a rich range of political, artistic, theatrical, social and religious meanings on the body. In her vibrant color photographs, Galembo highlights the artistry of the performers, how they use materials from their immediate environment to morph into a fantastical representation of themselves and an idealized vision of a mythical figure. In a gorgeous, fascinating photographic survey of Mexico's masking practices, Galembo captures her subjects suspended between past, present and future, with their religious, political and cultural affiliations—their personal and collective identifications—displayed on their bodies. Photographer **Phyllis Galembo** (born 1952) received her MFA from the University of Wisconsin–Madison in 1977, and was Professor in the Fine Arts Department of SUNY Albany from 1978 to 2018. A 2014 Guggenheim Fellow, Galembo has photographs in numerous public and private collections, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the New York Public Library. Her photographs of ritual masks in Africa, the Diaspora and beyond have been the subject of several monographic publications, including *Maske* (Aperture, 2016).

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